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Reynolds, Lewis G.

A Wonderful Hour with Abraham Lincoln

# LINCOLN ROOM

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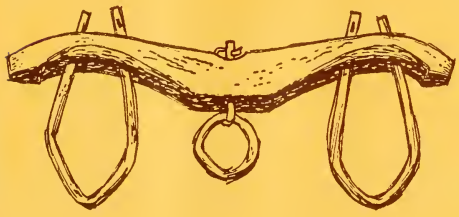

# MEMORIAL

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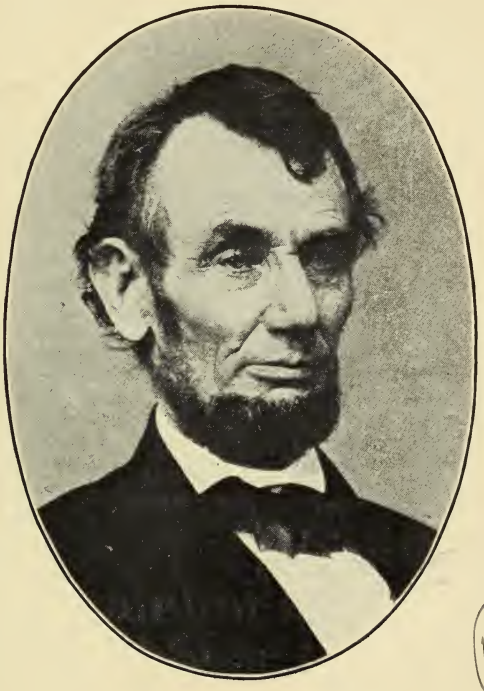
# A Wonderful Hour With Abraham Lincoln



By Lewis Gardner Reynolds

Lewis G. Reynolds
Washington D.C.
1929

Lewis G. Reynolds, Custodian of the Oldroyd Collection of Lincoln Relics in the Lincoln Museum, 516 Tenth Street, N. W. (the house in which the President died) Washington, D. C. Taken in 1928, in the room in which the President died.

Lewis G. Reynolds.

From a photograph taken in Washington in 1863 when he was six years old.

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Lincoln Room

# A Wonderful Hour With Abraham Lincoln.

The very earliest recollection I have of anything is intimately associated with the Civil War.

Well do I remember, although but 4 years old, when all that was mortal of a bright, manly boy was brought back to our little Ohio village and laid away in the churchyard. He was killed at the battle of South Mountain. The first soldier from Logan County to lose his life in battle. This lad was my favorite uncle, and his death and burial made so deep an impression upon my childish mind that from then on I became interested in everything pertaining to the conflict.

Soon after the incident mentioned above, my father became a government official. We removed to Washington and resided there from 1862 to 1866.

Father was chief of one of the many bureaus of the Treasury Department. All the clerks and higher officials of the department were organized into military companies, known collectively as "The Treasury Guards." They were intensively drilled by officers of the regular army, and as well equipped as the soldiers in the field, except that they were not uniformed. They represented a potential army of more than 1,000 men.

Their military duties were to be, in case of an emergency, to protect the Treasury Department and the Executive Mansion, near by.

Father was made captain of one of these companies, and to his command was assigned the protection of the White House, and the President. Upon that fact rests my story.

The men drilled every day, after working hours, and prepared themselves for real military duty if the occasion required.

Although but a youngster in kilts, so interested was I in all the military doings of the Capital, and especially in the work of the Treasury Guards, that I prevailed upon mother to take me up to father's office in the Treasury Department almost daily. We boarded not far away. It was on Pennsylvania Avenue, about half way between the Treasury Department and the Capitol—the house still stands.

The daily military drills of the Treasury Guards took place on the White House lawn, south of the Mansion. The President was a frequent spectator, sometimes mingling with "the boys," but more frequently viewing the maneuvers from the White House window, or from the portico. On one occasion, when the President was nearby on the lawn, Captain Reynolds was putting his men through Hardee's tactics for the first time without the aid of a regular army drillmaster, and wished, of course, to make a good impression upon his Commander-in-Chief. The Company was marching south, in platoons. There was, then, a terrace running east and west through the White House grounds, with a drop of about 2 feet. The captain, as his men approached this terrace, became completely rattled. He could not think of the proper command that would wheel them about, or otherwise avoid the obstacle; could not even say "Halt!" so down the embankment they went, but in such good order that many of the spectators, including the President, thought it a part of the drill.

I saw President Lincoln scores and scores of times, as father's duties took him frequently to the Executive Mansion, and he often took me with him.

The President's private office at that time, and continuously until Theodore Roosevelt's administration, was on the second floor of the White House proper.

On the occasion I have in mind, father was to have a special conference with his Commander-in-Chief, and I accompanied him. This was in the summer of 1864. While they were discussing the matter of the conference, which lasted nearly an hour, the President picked me up, set me on his knee, and I can feel yet the gentle stroke of that big, firm hand, as he stroked my head, like the halo of a great benediction. I almost remember his voice. I would describe it as a rich, round voice, full of tenderness and pathos. His outdoor speaking voice has been described as a "high-pitched" tenor, but his ordinary "talking voice" was quite different. Toward the end of the conference, Mr. Lincoln carried me to one of the large windows overlooking the Potomac River, rested me on the deep window seat and stood there with one arm about me while pointing out to the Captain some points of vantage he wished him to be familiar with.

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The Treasury Guards were never called upon for real military action. Only twice, I believe, was the Capitol threatened with attack when not guarded by the regular troops. On those two occasions, the Treasury Guards "slept on their arms," in the building, ready for instant action.

Father and mother were at Ford's' Theater the night of the assassination, and although it was late when they returned home, the general excitement of the night had reached our neighborhood. The newsboys' shrill cries of "Extra! Extra! President Lincoln Shot," had awakened everybody in the boarding house. I, too, was awake. Young as I was, I realized what a dreadful thing had happened, and I lay wide-eyed in my little trundle bed while father and mother related to the others their personal story of the tragedy.

Father, accompanied by several of the men guests, went back to the scene and did not return until after the fateful hour of 7:22 the next morning.

I remember as clearly as though it were of yesterday, wearing a wide band of black around the sleeve of my bright plaid jacket, and carried in father's arms, of passing the somber catafalque in the rotunda of the Capitol, which inclosed all that was mortal of the beloved Lincoln.

A few weeks later I witnessed the Grand Review of the Army—that wonderful spectacle of the returning boys in blue—which took several days in its passing.

Let us rejoice that Lincoln lived until the end was known—until the name of Lincoln and Liberty were united forever. He lived until there was nothing for him to do so great as he had done. The *living* world had no niche large enough to hold him—there was nothing left but death and immortal fame.

Marvelous man! Wonderful character! Strange mingling of mirth and tears, of humor and pathos, of comedy and tragedy; patient as Destiny, whose lines are so deeply graven on your sad and tragic face. Your life has been a lesson and an inspiration to your countrymen. Your prophesies have been fulfilled. In *their* hands and not in yours was the momentous issue of civil war. They *had no conflict* until they became, themselves, the aggressors. We are *not* enemies, now, but friends. "The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and soldier's grave to every heart and hearthstone throughout this broad land," both North and South, have long since swelled the chorus of the union, when again touched, as you said they would be, by the better angels of our nature.

I think the most beautiful encomium ever paid to Abraham Lincoln was that attributed to his stormy Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton.

Just as Stanton was about to leave the death chamber that morning, after the President's spirit had passed into the Great Beyond, he pointed to the dead Lincoln and said: "There lies the greatest *master of men* this world has ever seen since the time of the Christ. Now he belongs to the ages."

Abraham Lincoln! in solemn awe I pronounce thy name, and in its naked, deathless splendor leave it shining on.

## HIS ROSARY

**I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right—stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.**

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

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